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GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY
LANSING



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DIRECTOR

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To the Editor:

Your editorial and article of December 7, 2003, portrayed the Michigan Child Support Enforcement System as a “mess,” and called for a federal inquiry. It also suggested that “money isn’t reaching the families who need it.” These two statements play well as newspaper copy, but they do not represent the reality of Michigan’s child support program. Your readers deserve to know the rest of the story.

Consider these facts about the Michigan child support program.

- **Approximately \$30 million in child support is disbursed each week—nearly \$6 million per day—to support children and families.**
- **93% of support collected by the state’s disbursement unit is released the next day.** The remaining funds are held as required by law, or for research to identify the proper recipient and/or address.
- **Michigan has the second largest child support caseload in the country**—almost one million as counted by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. Only California has more child support cases—1.9 million. California has 11,000 workers, four times Michigan’s 2,600. Michigan ranks fourth in the nation in collections disbursed per worker.
- **Michigan ranks third best in the nation in collections disbursed**—over \$1.4 billion out of \$20 billion disbursed nationally.
- **Michigan has a federally certified child support system.** The nation’s experts on child support systems have reviewed Michigan’s system and agree that it functions exactly as they prescribe.

These facts show that money is getting to families, and in most cases, quite efficiently. Tens of thousands of Michigan parents pay and receive child support every month without fail.

It appears the Lansing State Journal is not aware of the extent and rigor of federal analysis leading to Michigan’s system certification. In fact, the federal government just completed a detailed review of Michigan’s system, involving five, week-long site visits over a two-year period. This led to the certification of Michigan’s system and the avoidance of \$147.5 million in penalties.

The editorial suggested the Governor should “aggressively outline a plan of action.” A comprehensive plan was developed and implemented to achieve federal certification. No state deploys a system statewide in two and one-half years without an aggressive plan of action. There is also a plan to improve the system—a plan that involves a new lead vendor, selected through an open bidding process (as required by state policy).

The editorial also suggested that Accenture, the new lead vendor, was new to the project. In fact, Accenture has been an integral part of the project for years.

No one in or out of the program would be naïve enough to suggest the system has no problems. Every day, customer service workers resolve individual customer problems and technical workers modify, fix, and improve the system. To suggest that program administrators and workers are insensitive to families denigrates the efforts of thousands of county and state workers who devote their working days to helping Michigan’s children and families.

Musette A. Michael, Acting Director